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ABSTRACT

In the counseling process the use of power as a therapist influence strategy has not been demonstrated. The purpose of this study was to investigate whether women and men prefer different types of power statements made by female and male therapists in an initial therapy session with male clients. Subjects (N=153) were undergraduates enrolled in English classes at the University of Tennessee, including 70 female and 83 male students. Subjects read a counseling scenario of an initial therapy session and were asked to choose the response they preferred the therapist to make. Respondents selected either an expert therapist response or a transformational therapist response. Comparisons were made based on the gender of respondents who read the scenario, the gender of the therapist in the counseling scenario, and the type of power/influence strategy selected by the respondents. Results of a chi-square analysis indicated that there were no significant differences between male and female respondents' preferences for expert power or transformational power, although both male and female respondents seemed to prefer expert power over transformational power. This was true regardless of therapist gender. The preference for expert power statements may have implications for female therapists working with some male clients. Both male and female respondents endorsed expert power slightly more often than transformational power indicating that when the client is male, female therapists were preferred to be more expert than empowering. (Contains 11 references.) (ABL)

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Power Statements in Therapy:
Implications for Women Counseling Men

Partial Data Presentation

of Master's Thesis

University of Tennessee, Knoxville

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ABSTRACT

In the counseling process, the use of power as a therapist influence strategy has not been demonstrated. The purpose of this study was to investigate whether women and men prefer different types of power statements made by female and male therapists in an initial therapy session with male clients.

One-hundred and fifty-three subjects (70 female, 83 male) read a counseling scenario of an initial therapy session and were asked to choose the response they prefered the therapist to make. Respondents selected either an expert therapist response or a transformational therapist response. Comparisons were made based on the gender of respondents who read the scenario, the gender of the therapist in the counseling scenario, and the type of power/influence strategy selected by the respondents.

Results of a chi-square analysis indicated that there were no significant differences between male and female respondents' preferences for expert power or transformational power, although both male and female respondents seemed to prefer expert power over transformational power. This was true regardless of therapist gender.

Implications for further study are discussed in light of these findings and limitations regarding reliability of the Counseling Scenario Protocol are acknowledged.

Power Statements in Therapy:
Implications for Women Counseling Men

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether women and men prefer different types of power statements made by female and male therapists in an initial therapy session with a male client. In particular, this study examined female and male respondents' choices of expert power versus transformational power statements in a printed counseling scenario. The gender of the client in all scenarios was male. The therapist's gender was either male or female depending on which scenario the respondent received. The independent variables, or predictors, were the therapists' gender and the respondents' gender. The dependent variables, or responses, were the respondents' choice of power statements.

Theoretical Bases for the Study

Preferences for types of power and influence strategies have been studied but without the emphasis on the male client-female therapist relationship. The theoretical framework for this study was based on the social exchange theory. The relationship of influence strategy and male clients was examined.

In a power-based social exchange, each individual gets and gives something that he or she wants, or needs. The potential exists for inequality of power in a social exchange based on

gender and role. The social exchange theory describes power as a matter of negotiation where both parties weigh the costs and rewards of various exchanges.

John French and Bertram Raven (1959) defined the structure of interpersonal power, or the source of one person's power over the other. From these early investigations, two possible power bases on which one person has power/influence with respect to another were investigated: expert power and transformational power.

Expert power is based on the possession of some needed skill or competence that is not possessed by the other person, for example, the expertise of a counselor. The perception of expertise gives expert power its influence rather than the actual content of the verbalization (French & Raven, 1959; Polk, 1974).

The transformative use of power is the act of empowering others (Wartenberg, 1988). According to Johnson (1976), empowerment is a process of gaining control over one's life and supporting others' control over their lives.

Kaschak (1981) asserts the role of the counselor as critical to ameliorate the power differential between men and women. Specifically, the power differential between client and counselor in therapy is a source of incongruity (Devoe, 1990; Gerber, 1988; Friedman, 1979). Thus, the use of transformational power is a process of equalizing power in the therapeutic relationship.

Hypotheses

The intent of this study was to investigate whether different power statements were selected by female and male respondents as a function of individual power apprehension or therapist gender. Specific hypotheses were:

1. There are no significant differences in female respondents' preferences for female and male therapist power statements with male clients.
2. There are no significant differences in male respondents' preferences for female and male therapist power statements with male clients.

Subjects

The subjects in this study were 153 undergraduate students at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville enrolled in English 101 and 102. These courses are required by the university of all undergraduate students.

Procedure

The investigator and one male colleague went to each classroom and distributed a packet containing an informed consent form, a demographic information sheet and the counseling scenario protocol. The packets had been placed into a random order prior to entering each classroom. Each class was asked to read and respond to the scenario. The packets were then collected and the response choices analyzed.

Subject Demographic Sheet

The Subject Demographic Sheet (SDS) was designed by the researcher. The instrument contains nine questions on gender, academic class, current academic program, age, native language, ethnic group, Tennessee resident status, and past experience with therapy/counseling.

The Counseling Scenario Protocol

The Counseling Scenario Protocol (CSP) is a brief description of an initial therapy session with a choice of therapist responses at the end. The CSP was designed by the researcher to assess the preferences for power statements used by male and female therapists with male clients.

Research Design

The design consisted of a one shot case study. This design was selected for its usefulness in exploring researchable problems and developing ideas for further study (Isaac and Michael, 1984). A 2 x 2 factorial design was used to test the research hypotheses, which dealt with the effects of the therapist's gender on the respondent's choice of power statement. The 2 x 2 factorial design permits the study of the effects of two factors each of which is varied in two ways (levels or values) (Isaac and Michael, 1984).

Data Analysis

The research hypotheses were analyzed using two chi-square Tests of Independence, one for male respondents and one for female respondents. The nonparametric single sample chi-square test was selected to investigate hypotheses one and two because nominal level measurements were used. The chi-square examines whether or not there is a significant difference in the proportions of males and females who prefer that therapists use expert or transformational power.

Results

There were no significant differences at the .05 level ($p=.446$) when female respondents were asked to determine their preferences for expert or transformational power statements made by female and male therapists in a printed counseling protocol for a male client. Similar results, ($p=.115$), were obtained with male respondents. Thus, both Hypotheses 1 and 2 could not be rejected.

A closer examination of the data, however, revealed that the male respondents chose expert power statements almost three times as often as they chose transformational power statements for female therapists (Expert=72.22%, Transformational=27.78%). When the therapist was a male, the male respondents were more evenly split (Expert=55.32%, Transformational=44.68%).

The female respondents were more evenly split overall between transformational and expert power statements, regardless of the gender of the therapist. There was a slight trend for the female respondents to select expert power statements over transformational power statements for both female therapists (Expert=51.52%, Transformational= 48.48%) and male therapists (Expert=59.46%, Transformational=40.54%).

Findings in Relation to General Limitations

There were several limitations present in this study which prevent it from providing conclusive information regarding the effects of therapists' use of power/influence strategies with male clients. First, the respondents in the study were reading a simulated counseling scenario of an initial therapy session and were not actual clients reacting to a therapy session. The use of a counseling scenario constitutes analogue research, which has limited generalizability to an actual therapy situation (Gelso, 1979).

Implications

In spite of the limitations inherent in this study, several implications can be drawn from the results. There were no preferences demonstrated by the respondents in this study for the use of one power/influence strategy over the other, although expert power was endorsed more frequently

than was transformational power. The ramifications here are that regardless of therapist gender, the respondents in this study preferred for the therapist to use an expert power response to inquiries by male clients in therapy. One possible conjecture for why these preferences were chosen is that only 15.7% of respondents indicated they had participated in counseling or therapy session. Their perceptions of the role of a therapist may have influenced preferences for influence strategies.

Nevertheless, the preference for expert power statements may have implications for female therapists working with some male clients. Both male and female respondents endorsed expert power slightly more often than transformational power indicating that when the client is male, female therapists were preferred to be more expert than empowering.

Recommendations

This study was a preliminary investigation of the use of power statements as an influence strategy in working with male clients. Extreme caution needs to be used in using the results of this study until such time that additional investigations are conducted on the use of power statements by therapists who work with male clients. Perhaps the finding that both males and females have a tendency toward

preferring the use of expert power statements is the finding that will cause other researchers to explore if this is generalizable to other setting and situations.

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